

****ATTENTION****

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Merlin

Falco columbarius

Range:

Merlins occur in every province in Canada and every state in the continental United States during some time of the year. The black merlin (*Falco columbarius suckleyi*) breeds in forested regions of the Pacific Coast, and remains primarily along the coastal states in winter. The western taiga merlin (*Falco columbarius bendirei*) breeds in the western United States, and winters across the western and southern United States, through Mexico and South America (Trimble 1975).

Washington Distribution:

Black merlins breed in coastal forests, with some individuals remaining along the coast in winter. Taiga merlins are found east of the Cascade Mountains in summer (Pend Oreille, Kittitas, and Klickitat Counties).

Habitat Requirements:

Taiga merlins nest in trees near open grasslands, meadows, lakeshores, or forest openings (Bechert and Ball 1983, Trimble 1975, Bent 1938). Nests may be built in trees from 4.5 - 55 feet above the ground, in cavities, or on cliff ledges (Trimble 1975).

Black merlin nests have been found in trees near large lakes, either built of sticks or located in cavities (Bent 1938). Most observed nests of black merlins were located very high in dense coastal stands of Douglas-fir, Pacific silver fir, western hemlock, and western red cedar (Trimble 1975).

Merlins feed almost exclusively on small to medium sized birds; reptiles, insects and small mammals may also be taken occasionally (Bechert and Ball 1983, Brown and Amadon 1968, Bent 1938). They forage over open sites such as prairies, meadows, or along forest edges of openings or major burns (Bechert and Ball 1983, Beebe 1974). In western Washington, shorebirds are important winter prey (Schick et al. 1987).

Male merlins arrive at their breeding grounds in April. Females arrive about one month later (Trimble 1975). The falcons generally do not nest at the same site in successive years, but may nest in the same general area (Brown and Amadon 1968, Fox 1964). Egg laying and incubation generally lasts from late May to late June; young fledge around late July (Call 1978).

Merlins tend to follow seacoasts during fall migration; in Washington, black merlins forage around tidal flats and open country during both fall and spring migration (Bent 1938, Trimble 1975). Wintering habitats are highly varied, ranging from forests, urban areas, farmlands, swamps, beaches, and others (Trimble 1975).

Limiting Factors:

Availability of suitable nest sites and adequate food supplies. Pesticide residues may also limit productivity to varying degrees (Trimble 1975).

Management Recommendations:

In eastern Washington, preserve native grasslands, which supply prey species for merlins. Planting scattered groves of trees in open areas will provide nest sites for merlins. In western Washington, protect important shorebird habitats, which are vital sources of winter prey.

Human activities, such as oil, gas, or mining exploration and development, logging, or other disturbances, should not occur within 1,200 feet of active merlin nests from March 15 through July 30. If concentrations of nesting merlin pairs are involved, more stringent restrictions may be appropriate (Bechert and Ball 1983).

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